

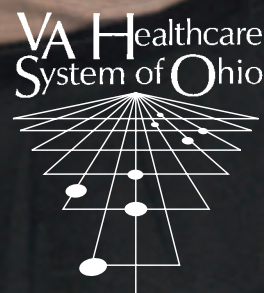
SPRING • 2004

Veterans' Health

THE WELLNESS MAGAZINE
FOR OHIO VETERANS

Veterans get
moving toward
better health

Keeping bones
stronger longer





Improve your health with a free wellness visit

Why not give your health a boost and feel as good as you possibly can? As a veteran, you're entitled to a free physical examination, known as a vesting visit, by VA Healthcare System of Ohio once every three years. If you've had any nagging problems lately but thought it was too expensive or too much trouble to address them, think again. With one simple visit, you'll be checked out from head to toe as a VA physician makes sure your eyes, ears, mouth, heart, lungs and joints—just to name a few—are in good working order. In addition, you'll benefit from health and safety tips.

"This visit gives us the opportunity to make preventive healthcare a normal part of veterans' routines and help avoid certain conditions," explains Charellitta Littlejohn, Chief, Patient Business Services at Cincinnati VA Medical Center. "In addition, vesting exams ensure that we receive congressional money so we can continue to provide care for veterans."

If you haven't seen a VA physician recently, don't hesitate to make an appointment now: You may be surprised to find there's still plenty you can do to take charge of your health. "Many illnesses can be slowed or prevented entirely with proper medical attention," Littlejohn says. "Veterans should work with their doctors to ensure a healthy, fit future." **VH**



About our mailing list

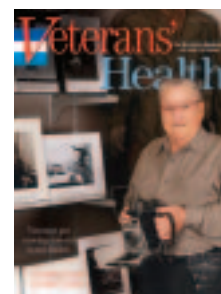
We make every effort to ensure our mailing lists are accurate.

If you have questions or would like to be added to or deleted from the list, let us know. Please include your entire address. To make a change, you *must* mail the mailing panel to:

Veterans' Health
VA Healthcare System of Ohio
Network Office
11500 Northlake Drive, Suite 200
Cincinnati, OH 45249

On the cover: one special veteran

Veteran Thomas J. Austin, age 85, stands in front of a display featuring his photos at Cincinnati VA Medical Center. Mr. Austin joined the U.S. Army in 1940 and served as a combat photographer during World War II. During the war, he served in France, Germany and the Philippines. He later worked as a successful photographer and businessman in Cincinnati. Today, he remains active as a volunteer with the Medical Media Department at Cincinnati VA Medical Center. **VH**



Veterans' Health is published quarterly as a patient education service by VA Healthcare System of Ohio, one of the 22 integrated networks of the Department of Veterans Affairs. The publication is intended to provide information to help you stay well, manage your healthcare and learn about the many health services available through VA. This publication is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your doctor. All articles may be reproduced for educational purposes.

The Mission of VA Healthcare System of Ohio is:

- To provide veterans a continuum of care that is accessible, value-added and cost-effective, and of the highest quality, within an environment of outstanding education and research.
- To promote a culture that supports and develops a caring, compassionate, competent and quality-oriented workforce.

Veterans' Health Editorial Directors

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Veterans on the move

Research shows frequent walking can reduce the risk of obesity, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, heart attack, stroke and stress. So why not try a **Volksmarch**, a noncompetitive, three- to six-mile group walk? You'll enjoy the companionship of other walkers, nature's beauty and our unique Ohio town scenery—all while boosting your health.

A comfortable Volksmarch for both veterans and others will be held on Sunday, May 16, from 2 p.m. to 5 p.m., on the scenic Little Miami River bike and walking trail in Corwin. Walk for free, or pay \$5 for a packet that includes a book to record all walks you



complete officially (\$3 if you already have the book and just want the walk recorded). Limited transportation from Dayton and Cincinnati VA Medical Centers may be arranged.

For more information on the Volksmarch or other U.S. walks, contact any of the following people:

David Van Winkle (VA)

937-262-2133

david.vanwinkle@med.va.gov

Bob and Judy Hawkins (OVA)

937-746-9394

brrhawk@aol.com

Ginny Drumm (OVA)

513-471-7029

ginnydrumm@fuse.net

You also can visit the American Volkssport Association (AVA) website at www.ava.org. **VH**

Veterans helping veterans

Next time you visit your VA medical center, you'll notice our brightly colored sign asking you to consider your fellow veterans: Let us know when you can't make your appointment.

About 40,000 veterans fail to show up for appointments at VA Healthcare System of Ohio each year. Besides missing out on important healthcare, no-shows prevent staff members from taking care of other veterans. This could result in delays of treatment for veterans waiting for appointments.

By taking a moment to call and cancel your appointment, you're helping other veterans receive the medical care they need. Imagine the increased number of appointments we can offer if everyone makes that phone call.

Be a buddy to your fellow veterans, and help us serve you better. **VH**



***Be a Buddy to
a Fellow Vet...***

**Call us when you can't
make your appointment.**

**WHEN YOU DON'T CALL TO CANCEL,
A FELLOW VET MISSES A CHANCE TO BE SEEN!**

Missed appointments so far this year:

Jan - Mar _____

Apr - Jun _____

Jul - Sep _____

Oct - Dec _____



Could David Bloom's death have been prevented?

A look at
deep vein
thrombosis

On April 6, 2003, NBC news correspondent David Bloom died while covering the war in Iraq. But the well-known 39-year-old journalist wasn't a victim of war. Bloom died from a blood clot in his lung.

Doctors believe Bloom's prolonged sitting in a tank's cramped quarters caused a blood clot to form in his leg—a condition known as **deep vein thrombosis**, or **DVT**. The clot then broke away and traveled into his lung, where it blocked a

blood vessel, causing his sudden death (pulmonary embolism).

DVT has been called “coach-class syndrome” or “economy-class syndrome” because people may develop it after long rides in coach class on airplanes. “However, first-class passengers are at risk of DVT, too, if they stay seated for long periods,” says Creighton Wright, M.D., Chief of Staff, Cincinnati VA Medical Center. “And while those with a history of heart disease, stroke, blood clots or obesity are at particular risk of developing DVT, the condition can affect healthy, fit people also.”

Spotting the signs

According to news reports, Bloom began to suffer from leg pain, a classic symptom of DVT, while riding in the tank. Experts also believe the severe heat in Iraq may have caused dehydration, which can trigger clotting. Other DVT symptoms include tenderness, swelling or changes in skin color in the affected area.

About 50 percent of DVT victims don’t know they have the condition until it leads to a *pulmonary embolism*—a dangerous condition when the blood clot breaks off, travels through the bloodstream and becomes lodged in a lung. An embolism can cause sudden shortness of breath, sharp chest pain upon taking a deep breath, rapid pulse, sweating, coughing up blood and, as in Bloom’s case, death.

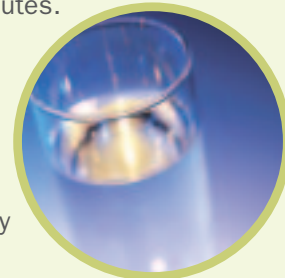
Knowing your risk factors

People often develop DVT after a prolonged period of inactivity, such as a lengthy car ride, bed rest or hospitalization. Pregnant women, too, can experience DVT as the uterus presses down on pelvic veins, reducing blood flow from the legs and pelvis. Injury to a blood vessel and clotting problems that

An ounce of prevention

According to Dr. Wright, the following steps can prevent DVT or reduce the chances that it will occur:

- Move around. During long car rides, stop about every hour to stretch and walk. On airplanes, move your leg muscles and walk around about every 30 minutes.
- Keep your legs uncrossed.
- Elevate your feet whenever you can.
- Stay hydrated by drinking plenty of water and avoiding alcohol.
- Keep your weight in check; obesity is a known risk factor for DVT.



occur with aging or illness also can cause the condition.

Genetic factors also can make people more susceptible to DVT, particularly if the condition develops unexpectedly. “Normally our blood clots to prevent excessive bleeding when we are injured,” Dr. Wright explains. “But some people have genetic blood disorders that cause blood clots to form spontaneously or with minor injury.”

What is DVT?

Deep vein thrombosis (DVT) is a condition when a blood clot forms and clots deep within a vein. The word “thrombus” means clot. Although a clot can originate anywhere, it typically develops in the leg or pelvic area.

Seeking treatment

To determine if patients have DVT, healthcare providers may use Doppler ultrasound—a noninvasive test that uses sound waves to locate any blockages in the veins. Less often, they take X-rays of the legs after injecting dye into the veins (contrast venography). Patients predisposed to spontaneous clotting or who require DVT treatment may receive anticoagulant drugs, such as heparin and warfarin, which reduce the blood’s ability to clot.

Knowing the facts about DVT and taking steps to prevent or treat it can protect your future health (see “An ounce of prevention”). Consult pages 170–172 of your *Healthwise® for Life* book to learn more about DVT prevention and home treatment. **VH**



Keeping stronger

Osteoporosis, a condition in which people lose bone mass at a dangerously rapid rate, causes porous, brittle bones that break easily. When bone loss occurs, everyday activities, such as stepping off a curb, bending down to pick up a newspaper or even coughing, can cause a fracture. Most injuries involve the wrist, spine and hips.

How our bones change as we age

Contrary to popular belief, bones aren't hard, white and lifeless structures. They're flexible, living, growing tissues. Bones stay healthy through a process called *remodeling*, when new bone forms to replace old bone. Until about age 35, people gain more bone than lose it. But after age 35, the process reverses. After menopause, the body stops producing bone-protecting estrogen, causing women to lose bone faster. This puts them at greater risk for osteoporosis.

Diagnosis and treatment

A telltale sign of osteoporosis is hunched-over posture, or a "hump." This may occur over time if the vertebrae in the spine collapses. Other symptoms of advanced osteoporosis may include:

- height loss
- breathing problems
- tooth loss
- back, rib and abdominal pain

Several options can help women if a test reveals significant bone loss:

- **Hormone replacement therapy (HRT).**

HRT not only slows bone damage in women but also rebuilds bone as long as women

Are you at risk?

You may be at risk for osteoporosis if you:

- have gone through early menopause (before reaching your late 40s)
- have an immediate relative who has developed the disease
- are Caucasian or Asian
- are thin and small-boned
- don't exercise
- don't get enough calcium
- consume three or more alcoholic drinks a day
- smoke

bones longer

continue taking the therapy. Women should talk with their healthcare providers, however, about the risks involved and determine if they are appropriate candidates for HRT.

- **Alendronate (brand name, Fosamax®).**

This nonhormonal medication, an alternative to HRT, can both prevent and rebuild bone loss.

- **Calcitonin (brand names, Miacalcin® and Calcimar®).** This hormone, taken either by nasal spray or injection, stops bone loss in the spine and relieves pain that may occur in the disease's late stages.

- **Raloxifene (brand name, Evista®).**

Raloxifene mimics the way estrogen works in the body to protect bones.

Women should discuss all pros and cons of each option with their healthcare providers.

Both women and men can protect their bone health by getting adequate amounts of calcium and

vitamin D in their diets and doing weight-bearing exercises like walking, jogging and stair climbing. Limiting alcohol intake (no more than one drink a day for women, two for men) and quitting smoking also can help combat the disease.

VA Healthcare System of Ohio offers bone densitometry testing. This painless test uses dual energy X-ray absorptiometry (DEXA) to study bone strength, usually in the spine and hip. The test takes just 30 minutes. Ask your VA healthcare provider for more information. **VH**

See pages 126–128
of your *Healthwise®*
for Life book
to learn more about
osteoporosis risks
and prevention.



IOM creates website just for vets

The Institute of Medicine (IOM), part of the National Academy of Sciences, has created a new website for veterans that provides information on a variety of military-related health issues.

“IOM’s new website is one more tool available to veterans, healthcare practitioners and others interested in the well-being of our veterans,” says Secretary of Veterans Affairs Anthony J. Principi.

The website, <http://veterans.iom.edu>, offers separate sections for healthcare issues related to the last four major military conflicts.

The site also covers information about deployment health as well as chemical and biological agents that may cause health problems for military members. **VH**

Get screened!

You can take many measures to protect your health. But if you’re not getting the health screenings you need, you’re not doing all you can to fight disease.

Early detection is key to effective treatment. Your *Healthwise® for Life* book on pages 24–25 offers a comprehensive health screening schedule. The schedule covers a scope of health conditions and tells you, for each one, when you should get tested. It also includes special risk factors and information you need to know. **VH**

Reaching Us Is Easy

Keep this information handy—when you need us, we'll be there.

MEDICAL CENTERS

Brecksville VA Campus

10000 Brecksville Road
Brecksville, OH 44141
440-526-3030

Chillicothe VA Campus

17273 State Route 104
Chillicothe, OH 45601
740-773-1141

Cincinnati VA Campus

3200 Vine Street
Cincinnati, OH 45220
513-861-3100

Dayton VA Campus

4100 West Third Street
Dayton, OH 45428
937-268-6511

Ft. Thomas VA Campus

1000 So. Ft. Thomas Avenue
Ft. Thomas, KY 41075
859-572-6202

Louis Stokes VA Campus

10701 East Boulevard
Cleveland, OH 44106
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INDEPENDENT OUTPATIENT CLINIC

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614-257-5200

COMMUNITY-BASED OUTPATIENT CLINICS

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Akron, OH 44319
330-724-7715

Athens VA Campus

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Athens, OH 45701
740-593-7314

Bellevue VA Campus

103 Landmark Drive
Bellevue, KY 41073
859-392-3840

Canton VA Campus

733 Market Avenue South
Canton, OH 44702
330-489-4600

Clermont County VA Campus

Eastgate Professional
Office Park
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Cincinnati, OH 45245
513-943-3680

Dearborn Co. VA Campus

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Lawrenceburg, IN 47025
812-539-2313

East Liverpool VA Campus

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East Liverpool, OH 43920
330-386-4303

Grove City VA Campus

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Grove City, OH 43123
614-257-5800

Lancaster VA Campus

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Colonnade Medical Building
Lancaster, OH 43130
740-653-6145

Lima VA Campus

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Lima, OH 45804
419-222-5788

Lorain VA Campus

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Lorain, OH 44052
440-244-3833

Mansfield VA Campus

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Mansfield, OH 44906
419-529-4602

Marietta VA Campus

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Marietta, OH 45750
740-568-0412

McCafferty VA Campus

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Middletown VA Campus

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Middletown, OH 45042
513-423-8387

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Painesville, OH 44077
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Richmond, IN 47374
765-973-6915

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Springfield VA Campus

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Springfield, OH 45505
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Warren VA Campus

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1400 Tod Avenue NW
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330-392-0311

Youngstown VA Campus

2031 Belmont Avenue
Youngstown, OH 44505
330-740-9200

Zanesville VA Campus

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740-453-7725

Call Tele-Nurse at 1-888-838-6446. • Visit us online at www.va.gov/visn10/.

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